

## **‘You are my Australia’: Brian Medlin’s contribution to Iris Murdoch’s concept of Australia in *The Green Knight***

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In September 2008 I was contacted by a librarian at another institution in Adelaide asking if Flinders University Library’s Special Collections would be interested in some papers of the late Brian Medlin. I was told it covered mainly philosophical subjects, including some correspondence with a colleague about the philosophy of language. As Medlin was our foundation Professor of Philosophy, and a high profile figure in South Australia, I agreed to take the papers. Upon sorting through the three small archive boxes, I found, my delight and surprise, an envelope labelled ‘Letters from Iris Murdoch.’ Perhaps if my colleague had had a quick look through the boxes and found these precious letters, she wouldn’t have passed them on to us so readily.

Brian Medlin met Iris Murdoch at Oxford in 1961 when he joined New College as a Research Fellow. Her husband, John Bayley, who was also at New College, introduced them, and they remained friends for the remainder of her life, though after he left Oxford they only met once again. Medlin, born in 1927, was already in his mid-thirties when he arrived at New College. He had not had a typical academic career. After graduating from Adelaide Technical School, he spent a few years in outback Australia as a store-keeper, kangaroo shooter, stockyard builder, horse-breaker and drover. He returned to Adelaide in the early 1950s and, while working as a clerk and a teacher, studied English, Philosophy and Latin at Adelaide University. After graduating with first-class honours in 1958, he went to Oxford on a scholarship, taking a year off to teach philosophy in Ghana before taking up his fellowship at

New College in 1961. He was appointed to the chair of philosophy at the new Flinders University (founded in 1966) in its second year (Schumann).

In the envelope in the Medlin Collection were forty-two letters to Medlin from Murdoch, written over about twenty years from the mid-1970s to 1993. Fortunately, much of Medlin's side of the correspondence also survives in electronic copies he kept: I understand from Anne Rowe's article on Murdoch's letters that she 'habitually destroyed all letters she received' (212, note 3), so although Peter Conradi informs us that she corresponded with dozens of people and 'spent up to four hours a day writing letters' (On Iris, 21), this correspondence may be unusual in showing the perspectives of both correspondents. It is also interesting to note the disparity between the volume of their respective portions of the letters. Although there are roughly twice as many letters from Murdoch as from Medlin in the collection, her side of the correspondence amounts to about 5,000 words, while his computer files add up to about 60,000. All the characteristics of the letters Rowe discusses in her article apply to Murdoch's letters to Medlin: they are often hurried, scrawled, written with just a few words to a line so they fill more of the page than necessary; and sometimes virtually illegible – Medlin complains about it in a letter dated 31 May 1986:

Iris your hand-writing is awful. Worse than mine even and I've got an arthritic thumb these days. Did you too break your thumb crossing Mambray creek in flood? There is still one obdurate bit that I haven't worked out.

She often apologises, as well, for not writing sooner or writing briefly, and solicits letters in return, just as Rowe observes in the other correspondence. However, John Bayley confirms my impression that she was genuinely fond of Medlin, in late 1992 she did Medlin a huge favour by writing a review of his book *Human Nature, Human Survival* for publication in the Melbourne newspaper the *Age*. She took an immense amount of trouble over the review, and

there are several worried letters from her during the writing. Eventually she delivered a handwritten document amounting to more than 4,000 words – five times more than had been requested. Medlin edited it down to 1,000 words and it was published in the *Age* on 27 February 1993.

Brian Medlin was a brilliant man: a poet and raconteur as well as a philosopher. He was a Marxist and an environmentalist, and his vehement opposition to the Vietnam War led to three-week stint in prison in 1970. He was a major player, for better or worse, in the student unrest which led to the two-week occupation of the Flinders University Registry building in 1974. It is tempting to see him as the kind of man who often appears in Murdoch's novels – vital, witty, unconventional, and a fiercely independent thinker. In a letter written in late 1991 or early 1992, she signed off with 'You are my Australia. ... Much love to you, friend in a hundred guises, splendid magician' (Letter 24).

In his letters he regaled her at length with Australian ballads, jokes, travel stories and anecdotes, sent copies of his philosophical articles and book reviews, and answered her many questions about Australian flora and fauna, and the Australian vernacular. In particular, when Murdoch was writing *The Green Knight*, she asked him for help with some vocabulary for her Australian character, Kenneth Rathbone. In this paper I am interested in establishing in what ways (if any) Medlin's letters influenced Murdoch's image of Australia as it emerges in *The Green Knight* and other late novels.

From the first, I would like to make it clear that I am not claiming that Australia is a major preoccupation of Murdoch in her novels or in her life, any more than I'm claiming that Brian Medlin was a major figure in her world. Australia does not appear in the index of either *Existentialists and Mystics* or Peter Conradi's *Iris Murdoch: A Life*. In my collection of interviews, *From a Tiny Corner in the House of Fiction*, there are only two index entries, and

in Hazel Bell's excellent index to the novels on the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies website, there is a small clutch of mainly passing references covering eight of the novels. So Australia is certainly marginal in her life and work. Its place in her imagination is also marginal in the sense that Australia in the novels usually represents a distant place, somewhere to escape to.

This is the context of Australia's first appearance in one of her novels. In *The Flight from the Enchanter*, first published in 1956, the timid refugee seamstress Nina thinks of escaping from Mischa Fox by going to Australia:

She pictured a life in Australia which would be in every way the reverse of her present life. There a rough and generous people would take her to their hearts. She would live in their midst a life of openness and gaiety, respected as a worker and loved as a woman. (144)

Nina seems to have gained this impression of Australia by watching Australian films. In *The Nice and the Good* (1968), Paula Biranne's lover Eric Sears has disappeared to Australia two years ago, having broken up her marriage, and she receives a letter from him threatening to reappear thence and upset her life further.

In *A Word Child* (1975) Australia is particularly marginal: firstly, Christopher Cather, Hilary's lodger, had a pop group, Treason of the Clerks, which had 'brief but considerable success ... mainly on a tour of Australia' (2) and then Hilary suggests to his sister Crystal, in half-serious desperation, that they emigrate to Australia to start anew and escape the muddle of their English lives (306). Ben and Hartley in *The Sea, the Sea* (1978) on the other hand, are not joking, though Charles wishes they were, when they announce that they're emigrating. Ben says, 'I can't think why everybody doesn't go. Lovely climate, cheaper grub, cheaper housing. ... Sydney harbour, Sydney opera house, cheap wine, kangaroos, koala bears, the lot, I can't wait (423).' Even though Charles tells them he's been there himself several times,

it seems irretrievably distant. It means he will never see Hartley again. With this move, Ben takes Hartley (willingly or not) completely out of Charles' orbit, just as Nina had hoped to escape Mischa Fox's range of influence by fleeing to Australia in *The Flight from the Enchanter*. Richard Todd, in a 1986 symposium, suggested that 'Australia was often a way, a place for characters to just leave at the end of the novel, to exit or ... to start a new life. But it is also a way of getting them out of the world of the novel, isn't it?' In response, Murdoch quipped, 'Yes, certainly. Yes, I mean you don't want to kill them all, you know, you send them to Australia' (178).

Marion, in *Jackson's Dilemma* (1995), visits Australia for a holiday, and falls in love with the country and with one of its citizens. 'The bright friendly atmosphere of lovely Sydney suited her ... As happens in Sydney she met all sorts of people' (109). The country is not so unattainably distant in this last novel, but it is still a place of transformation. Once she returns to England, things are just not the same with her fiancé Edward Lannion.

During the year between completing *The Nice and the Good* and its publication, Murdoch made her only visit to Australia, a lecture tour with John Bayley in February and March 1967, arranged through the British Council. Murdoch wasn't a big name in Australia then, and the announcement of her lecture at Sydney University takes up three short paragraphs on page 7 of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, with John Bayley's name misspelled, sandwiched between the bridge results and news of a meat strike (Novelist). Unlike Eric in *The Nice and the Good*, who is travelling back (slowly and inexorably) from Australia by ship, she and John Bayley travelled by air: this was the period when air travel was beginning to take over from the leisurely trip by ocean liner which took three weeks or more. I have a transcript of her diary entries, but they are extremely brief and convey almost nothing of her impressions of the country.<sup>i</sup> In five weeks, she visited eight cities: Perth, Sydney, Canberra,

Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville, Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart; making an occasional day trip into the ‘bush’ or to a country town, but never getting far off the beaten track and certainly getting nowhere near the real outback. John Bayley recalls that the visit to Adelaide, where they were hosted by Brian Medlin, was ‘happier and more successful’ than any other part of their time in Australia, although they were only here for a three days. In a newspaper interview in New Zealand, a little later on the same trip, she said, ‘This is the first time we have made such an extended trip – we have just come from India. I was feeling a bit alarmed at coming such a long way but the sheer friendliness helps.’ She added, ‘It will all take a while to digest – though I’m not especially after material’ (Talking). This seems to be the case of both the Australian and New Zealand visits: as noted above, very little of her fiction uses an antipodean setting, even indirectly. On the way back they spent five days in Thailand, then stopped over in Istanbul for a couple of nights before flying back to England, ‘Thank God’, on 17 April.

In a letter to Brian Medlin dated 2 July 1976, the first in this collection, she refers to her visit: ‘Tom Collins I read with the greatest pleasure before I visited Australia – he was an excellent introduction to your marvellous country.’ Tom Collins is the pseudonym of Joseph Furphy (1843-1912), author of the classic Australian novel *Such is Life*. Published in 1903, this novel is a strikingly modern, almost postmodern, exploration of episodes in the life of a bullock driver. However, the narrator of the novel never visits a city, travelling around the countryside in New South Wales and Victoria. Written some seventy years before Murdoch’s visit to Australia, its usefulness as an introduction for a visitor who is spending most of her time in the coastal cities seems partial at best.

In his letters, Medlin often seems at pains to disabuse her of certain stereotypes, although as a keen bushman himself he also reinforces some, writing from remote campsites

using his computer, even in the 1980s: ‘You can plug it, and the little printer, into a gum tree. (In fact the charger of the car)’ (Letter, 31 May 1986). In August or September 1991, she wrote, ‘I think of your country as mainly untouched wildness,’ and he immediately wrote back, ‘Australia as untouched wilderness. A myth that is contributing to the continuing destruction’ (Letter, 19 Sept. 1991). She expressed the hope that Australia remained untouched by Derrida and post-modernism, and he responded, ‘Yes, *of course*, we are plagued by post-modernists. Why do you think that I routinely abuse Derrida?’ (Letter, 28 Feb. 1992). One of the most amusing threads in the correspondence begins when Medlin takes up the subject of the Australian vernacular, as she had requested:

The Australian language thing is hard for two reasons. For one, there is no Australian language any more ... We’re thoroughly Americanised. My kids talk of ‘dudes’ and use the American vowel to do so. Make sure that when you character sings, she does so with an American accent. For another thing Australianness resides, not just in vocabulary, but in the phrasing. Not just in set phrases like ‘flat out like a lizard drinking’, but in the **style** of phrasing. (Letter, 19 Apr. 1991)

In her reply, she tries out this phrase on him: ‘I am feeling rotten – flat out like a lizard’ (Letter 28, 28 May 1991). His response was, ‘you are not flat out like a lizard. You are flat out like a lizard *drinking*’ (Letter, 2 Jul. 1991). She replies, ‘I note it should be ‘flat as a lizard drinking’ but I have forgotten which it actually means – is it good or bad?’ (Letter 30, 15 Aug. 1991). This generated the following response:

Oh my dear Iris, what are we going to do with you!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Not, repeat NOT flat as a lizard, but

FLAT OUT LIKE A LIZARD DRINKING

The words are fixed and fossilised into an imperishable beauty destined to remain in midst of other woe than ours and no more to be tampered with by pommy novelists than are the legs of Phar Lap [legendary Australian racehorse] to be redesigned by a merry-go-round proprietor. (Letter, 24 Aug. 1991)

Her next letter begins, patiently ‘Brian dear, many thanks, and about the now clarified lizard. (At least, I’m still not quite sure what it means)’ (Letter 22, undated). And finally the clarification comes: ‘Iris Dear, The lizard: It means that you are extremely busy. Even to the point of being frazzled’ (Letter, 19 Sept. 1991). This enlightenment didn’t seem to spill into her novels, alas: the phrase doesn’t appear in the published works, and her Australian characters’ dialogue participates in little of Medlin’s colourful discourse.

There are three Australian characters in her novels. The young Penn Graham, in *An Unofficial Rose* (1962), is the most fully realised of these, with several chapters focalised through him. The other two appear in the last two novels: Cantor Ravnevik, Marion’s lover in *Jackson’s Dilemma*, and Kenneth Rathbone, the landlord at the Castle, the pub where Bellamy often meets Peter Mir in *The Green Knight*.

*An Unofficial Rose* was written before she knew Brian Medlin: the final draft was finished in July 1961: her preliminary notebooks, held at the University of Iowa, show that Penn’s Australian background was already fleshed out considerably before September 1960 (Notes), and Medlin’s fellowship at New College would not have started until Michaelmas Term (that is September/October) 1961. Peter Conradi tells me that one of her ‘colleagues from St Anne’s College was from Australia and might have assisted these researches’ (Email). However, Penn’s background is very specifically an Adelaide one, and it is an interesting coincidence that she met Brian Medlin, from Adelaide, so soon after writing this novel.



Penn Graham is the teenage son of Randall Peronett's sister Sarah, who married an Australian she met during the war and who is now happily living in the Adelaide beachside suburb of Marino with her growing family. Penn has come to England for a long-awaited holiday with his English relatives only to find misery and chaos: his grandmother dying, his uncle and aunt warring with each other, and his cousin Miranda mysterious and unfriendly. Murdoch steers away from several Australian stereotypes with the character of Penn. For one thing, highly implausibly, he's known as Penny in Australia. His aunt Ann calls him Penny 'to make him feel at home', but he wishes she wouldn't: as Miranda says, 'mockingly, "But it's a girl's name!"' (46). Why he would be called by this girlish name in conventional Adelaide in the late 1950s is a mystery, while his siblings have ordinary names like Jeanie and Timmie and Bobby. At any rate, Penn's grandfather Hugh finds that he is 'quite unlike the tough Australian grandson of [his] imaginings. Given what the boy's father was like, they had all been prepared for something roughish, but not for this rather pathetic elf' (10). Both Hugh and Randall remark unfavourably on Penn's Australian accent behind his back, and when Miranda has occasion to insult him his accent inevitably comes up: 'Everyone knows you're stupid, with your beastly common accent' (263). But despite the 'scandalised amazement of his English relatives who imagined Australians were always galloping across endless plains,' Penn can't ride a horse and has 'no desire to learn' (47). He wants to be a motor mechanic, is good at cricket, and cheers himself up by reading *Such is Life*.

Penn is an interesting character for several reasons. Firstly, he, as an Australian, seems to embody some kind of innocence which the English part of the family lacks:

Penn Graham found the behaviour of his English relations absolutely incomprehensible. His uncle Randall had gone off publicly with another woman. Yet

everyone was behaving quite calmly and cheerfully as if nothing had happened. ...

Penn knew that if his own parents had parted he would have run mad. (227)

When he falls in love with Miranda, 'the problem of sexual desire ... simply did not exist for him' (228). When it comes, it is 'terrible, black, new' (231) for this fifteen-year-old. He finds the attentions of the ageing paedophile Humphrey Finch not in the least troubling, despite everyone else's misgivings. But Humphrey is careful and discreet, and after Penn's return (still unworried and apparently unscathed) to Australia is said to be consoling himself in Rabat: the youth of Morocco are clearly fair game where the grandson of his old friend Hugh Peronett is not.

Penn's homesickness is composed of two strands – missing Australia and feeling uncomfortable with his relations' English ways. He was

depressed by the countryside ... he disliked its smallness, its picturesqueness, its outrageous greenness, its beastly wetness. He missed the big tawny air and the dry distances and the dust; he even missed the barbed wire and the corrugated iron and the kerosene tins; he missed, more than he would have believed possible, the absence of the outback, the absence of a totally untamed beyond. (49)

Yes, perhaps in Marino, a newly developed beachside suburb overlooking St Vincent's Gulf, there would be some barbed wire and corrugated iron, and despite the fact that while writing this I am looking out of the window of my 130-year-old semidetached house on a wet wintry Adelaide day, with a crumbling hundred-year-old wall ten feet away across the lane, during much of the year there are 'dry distances and dust' to be found not far from Adelaide.

Rather more compelling is Penn's sensitivity to his relatives' class behaviour:

It irked him that even Ann, who was so kind, did not treat Nancy Bowshott as an equal. This instance of class-prejudice so constantly before his eyes incited him to

such a degree that he had adopted an air of ostentatious affability and mateyness with Nancy: until he became aware that she thought he was flirting. (49)

In his Adelaide home, with a committed unionist for a father, it is indeed likely that he would have been offended by this behaviour: though class distinctions are still not unknown in Australia, it is and probably was in 1960 quite an egalitarian society.

Penn's dialogue is not overloaded with Australianisms. At a moment of extreme emotion he exclaims 'Ah, gee—' (87), but otherwise his Aussie vocabulary is limited to his unspoken description of lunch at Seton Blaise as 'bonzer' (227), and in other respects he speaks just as any other fifteen-year-old Murdoch character might.

Similarly, there is little of an especially Australian quality about the dialogue of Cantor Ravnevik, Marion's Australian lover in her last novel *Jackson's Dilemma*, published in 1995. In fact, the one 'Australian' expression he does use is highly unlikely from someone of his education and background: he refers to the Aborigines as 'Abos' (220) (as indeed Murdoch often does herself in her letters): this has been for many years regarded in Australia as a pejorative term similar to 'nigger'. Cantor is an Australian of Scandinavian and German descent, not a particularly common background for an Australian, but nevertheless plausible. In creating a character like this, Murdoch shows her awareness that Australia, especially in the cities, is a society made up of a huge variety of nationalities, and perhaps this contributed to its appeal for her as a place for new beginnings.

Like most of the characters in *Jackson's Dilemma*, Cantor is rather opaque, but as far as his background is concerned, the most implausible thing about him is that his brother's enormous sheep farm is within easy driving distance of Sydney – the really large farms are in the arid inland areas, many hundreds of miles from Sydney – and also that the family is so rich: the average annual income from a sheep farm in 1998 was AUD\$12,446 (Agriculture).

Large acreage doesn't equate to wealth when the land is dry and infertile. But then, the economics of *Jackson's Dilemma* as a whole are quite unlikely. It seems likely that when this novel was written, Murdoch's Alzheimer's was beginning to take hold, and the magical, unearthly quality that characterises all her fiction to some extent is magnified as a result. A 2005 article in *Clinical Psychiatry News* confirms this impression (Finn).

The other Australian character in the novels is the publican in *The Green Knight*, Kenneth Rathbone. I must say, I've met Australians rather like Penn and Cantor, but no-one like Kenneth Rathbone. For one thing, a 'dinkum Oz' like him would be known as Ken, not Kenneth. Few of the expressions he uses appear in Medlin's quite extensive advice to Murdoch on the Australian vernacular, from April 1991, responding to her request:

I have a very nice minor character who is Australian. I have quite a lot of vocabulary, but might do with more. What are Australian terms for 'bastard' (as well as 'bastard')? Also any terminology about 'a really good guy'. Any oddments welcome.  
(Letter 7, undated)

Medlin replied on 19 Apr 1991 with characteristic gusto:

Words for 'bastard'. My friend Charles Jury, dead alas since 1958, once compressed Christian theology into this limerick. You shouldn't go through life without knowing it:

There was a young man from Cape Cod  
Who didn't believe in a God.  
His name was Ken Tucker,  
The bleeder, the fucker,  
The bugger, the bastard the sod.

Murdoch was much taken with this limerick. She made a note in her diary that she found it ‘very cheering’.<sup>ii</sup> He went on, ‘As for “a really good guy”, the national experience is so poor in examples that we haven’t developed any language to accommodate them. “Alright” said in the right way is about as good as you can get.’ But, he warned,

A lot depends on your character. Whether she’s witty or demonstrative or broad-mouthed, tight-lipped or what. To some extent also on her social background. And on her age. If she’s twenty and talks like me it’ll be something like describing the kangaroos in the main street of Adelaide. ...

It may be worth-while bearing in mind that there is a certain kind of Australian who eschews Australianisms. Not colloquialisms, but Australianisms. I’m sure, though, that your friend, being very nice, would not be one of those.

You’ve made me feel like the centipede who was asked how she walked.

Kenneth Rathbone’s dialogue is variable in its authenticity. The first time his speech is reported, he is said to have ‘disappeared into the kitchen to “slant a beaker”’ (339), an expression I don’t remember ever having heard before. However, when he then tells Bellamy ‘in a friendly way to “fuck off”’, we are in more familiar Australian territory. This is about the most normal Australian expression he ever uses. Next, he is quoted as saying to Bellamy,

Listen, sport, I want to know what’s happening to my mate? Who was that bastard you were conveying? (347)

‘Sport’ used in the vocative like this is quite possible – mildly insulting and patronising, perhaps the equivalent of an Englishman calling someone ‘my good man’. And, as Medlin wrote,

‘Mate’ persists, both vocatively and descriptively, in spite of unremembering hearts and heads. My acquaintance, male and female deal in it. My children call me ‘mate’ –

except, I think, Margie. Christine and I use it towards one another as a matter of course. (Letter, 19 Apr. 1991)

He also used it in his letters to Murdoch, and she had already begun the habit of addressing him in the same way. ‘Bastard’ is fine as a term of abuse, also ‘both vocatively and descriptively’, and in the same letter he included an extensive disquisition on its various uses, for example, “‘Absolute bastard’ has the advantage of explicitly rejecting moral relativism.’ The main problem with this bit of dialogue is the sentence construction and that strange use of ‘conveying’, unnatural, I would have thought, in any version of English.

The next time Rathbone speaks, he lapses into Americanism which, as Medlin pointed out, is not unknown in Australia: ‘I guess I’ve known him more than most here have...’ (356). On the following page he is back with the Australian dialect with, ‘Well said, cobber’ (357). That’s perfectly fine. ‘Cobber’ is used in the vocative, very much like ‘mate’. However, it is not used in the way Rathbone uses it later: ‘A cobber in a white coat saw me.’ ‘Bloke’ would almost certainly be the word he would have used in this context, rather than ‘cobber’. ‘I did myself up shabby in overalls’ sounds more like cockney than Australian. And as for ‘We had such a talking,’ once again it has an unnatural ring to it in any English speech (449).

In her letter responding to his of 19 September 1991, she wrote, ‘Thanks for Mallee news, and also “stonkered”. (I’ll pass stonkered on to the chap in my novel – I sorry now he’s not a main character)’ (Letter 25, undated). ‘Stonkered’ is a fine Australianism, defined in the *Penguin Macquarie Dictionary* as ‘exhausted; lethargic, as after a large meal,’ but it didn’t make the final cut of *The Green Knight*. Rathbone’s final words to Bellamy, before he disappears to that distant and romantic land of Murdoch’s imagination, are:

Yes, it's shift, boys, shift. I'm going home too. I'm going back to dear old Oz where I belong, where the sky is where it ought to be, way up far above in heaven, not sitting on top of your head the way it is here. (450)

Though she may not have heard these ideas from Medlin, she certainly connected them with him. In the same letter of late 1991, she wrote: 'I recall some Aussie, perhaps you, saying that clouds in England were all too low, whereas in Australia they were in the right place, very high up.' And 'Shift, boys, shift' comes from Banjo Paterson's 'Bushman's Poem'. She quoted it in her letter replying to his of 9 September 1992: 'Thank you for the ballads! I like these offerings very much. I often think about the Man from Snowy River [also by Paterson] and Shift, Boys, Shift! You chaps are unique' (Letter 2, undated).

'You are my Australia', Murdoch wrote to Medlin. He was a vivid and individual correspondent – his prose is inimitable, and whether or not she really relied on him to help her with the Australian vernacular, the result is far from convincing. She seems to have forgotten that she had asked him for help: in 1993, just before *The Green Knight* was published and two years after she asked him to supply her with vocabulary for her 'very nice' Australian character, she wrote: 'Did I tell you I have a dinkum Oz man in my next novel. He is the nicest (though secondary) character.' This is before the letters seem to become confused with the onset of Alzheimer's. The rest of this letter is quite coherent, so it might be just a case of the forgetfulness of a busy correspondent, as occasionally manifests itself in repetitions earlier in the correspondence.

I haven't been able to discover whether she corresponded regularly with any other Australians. These letters, like the letters discussed in Anne Rowe's article, 'illustrate the loving attention to others that she gave so willingly' (204). As seems to have been her wont, she kept this friendship separate from others in her life, and in their warmth her letters give

the impression of a special and unique friendship with Medlin, which he reciprocated. Like most Australian males, he was not a demonstrative man, but he was moved to write:

I have got so much from your novels, especially in recent years, that they have become, like Yeats' close companions, a portion of my life and mind, as it were. I am deeply your debtor, mate. I love you lots, Iris. (Letter, 19 Sept. 1991).

That she really did value his friendship and was not just keeping up the correspondence for some ulterior motive – milking it for 'material', for example – I think is clear from the enormous effort she made to review his book at a time when she was not only busy but clearly finding such a sustained intellectual exercise quite difficult. However, his influence on her fiction is slight, and despite all his attempts to complicate her idealised vision of Australia, it seems that she had found out as much about Australia by 1960 when she was writing *An Unofficial Rose*, before she knew Medlin and before visiting the country in 1967, as she knew thirty years later when writing *The Green Knight* and *Jackson's Dilemma*.

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<sup>i</sup> Thanks to John and Audi Bayley for providing me with this transcript.

<sup>ii</sup> This limerick is mentioned in a footnote Peter Conradi's *Iris Murdoch: A Life*. He quotes from her journal, 28 May 1990 [actually 1991, confirmed by Conradi by email, 18 May 2010]: 'Offering from Brian Medlin: [the limerick quoted in full]. (Very cheering)' (316n).